

Colour printed pictorial map, crayon marks to margins, mounted on original card, with title to verso

ONCE UPON A TIME, IN A LAND FAR AWAY...

The Land of Make Believe.

Author
HESS, Jaro

Publication date
1930.

Publisher
The Child’s Wonderland Co.,

Publication place
Michigan,

Physical description
Colour printed pictorial map, crayon marks to margins, mounted on original card, with title to verso

Dimensions
630 by 915mm (24.75 by 36 inches).

Notes
‘The Land of Make Believe’, is an iconic piece of American popular culture, which continues to provide inspiration to artists to this day – the album cover of Elf Power’s ‘When the Red King Comes’ (1997), and Matt Groenig’s (creator of ‘The Simpsons’) ‘Disenchantment’ series.

Presiding over this magic realm of nursery rhymes and folktales from all around the world is the

rickety (Dr. Seussian) tree house of “Grandfather Know All”, the wise character at the centre of a traditional Czech folktale. To the right is “The Glass Mountain”, the setting for a Polish tale, and in the far corner, “The Emerald City of Oz”. At the foot of Grandfather Know All’s tree, is the castle where “Old King Cole Lives and the Fiddlers Three Occasionally Fiddle”, while snaking round the bottom-right is “The Path that Leads to No Place Eventually”, and centre-left is an ominous hole with the warning “Do Not Go In Here”.

‘The Land of Make Believe’ provided Hess and his contemporaries a cathartic escape from the hardships of the Great Depression: many of the tales depicted tell of the triumphs of the weak over the strong, and the ultimate success of a long quest. During the Depression, Hess received a WPA commission to create dioramas of Michigan history for the Grand Rapids Public Museum. However, at the outset of WWII, he moved east, and worked in an aircraft factory, before retiring to Grand Rapids in 1950.

Hess claimed that ‘The Land of Make Believe’ was shown at Chicago’s ‘Century of World Progress’, in 1933, and that he was elected an honorary fellow of the Royal Horticultural Society for his hybridization of delphiniums, but neither is supported by available evidence (although he is recorded as a member of the American Primrose Society). However, Hess did self-publish the map earlier in 1930, and that issue includes the date of printing beneath Hess’s signature in the lower-left corner, and his imprint, “Jaro Hess”, bottom-centre. A subsequent edition was published in 1958, with the imprint of Charles R. Sligh, and with the figure of “The Wandering Jew”, in the bottom-right of the map, renamed “The Wanderer”.

The Mapmaker
Painter, landscape designer, steel-worker, maker of puppet-stages and dioramas, Jaro Hess (1899-1979) pursued a varied career. Born possibly in Prague, possibly in Austria, he undertook a degree in metallurgical engineering, had a brief stint in the French Foreign Legion, and in the Austrian army, before emigrating to the US in 1910. Once in the US, he worked in the Pittsburgh steel mills, then joined his father-in-law’s plant nursery, Hardy Plant Farm, which he would later take over.

Bibliography

Provenance

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